

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 1732

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, CB
SUBJECT: STORY OF A SUCCESSFUL KC ANTI-RESISTANCE OPERATION

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SUMMARY: A KC OFFENSIVE OF JAN 4-11 SUCCEEDED IN RIDDING AN AREA SOUTH OF ARANYAPRATHET, INSIDE CAMBODIA, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY OF RESISTANCE ELEMENTS. WITHOUT A DOUBT IT SHATTERED THOSE THAT HAD BEEN BASED THERE. IF THE SUCCESS OF THE OPERATION SERVES AS AN EXAMPLE, THAT RESISTANCE OF WHICH WE KNOW TO THE CAMBODIAN REGIME HAS LITTLE PROSPECT OF SUCCESS. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY HAS REPORTED THE KC OFFENSIVE AGAINST CAMBODIAN RESISTANCE GROUPS LOCATED ALONG THE THAI BORDER IN WESTERN BATTAMBANG PROVINCE EARLIER THIS MONTH (REF A). DURING FINAL PROCESSING OF PAPERWORK PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FOR THE U.S. AS A REFUGEE, LEADER OF ONE GROUP, KHOURN THAI, WHOM EMBOFF HAD ONCE MET ACCIDENTALLY IN ARANYAPRATHET (REF B), TOOK
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TIME TO RECOUNT EVENTS OF EARLY JANUARY.

2. KHOURN THAI DESCRIBED THE AREA OF CAMBODIAN SOUTH OF THAILAND'S BORDER TOWN OF ARANYAPRATHET AS IT WAS ON JAN 1, A DESCRIPTION SIMILAR TO THE PREVIOUS ONE OF AMCIT BRUCE BARNEY (REF C). KC CONTINUED TO OCCUPY THE EARLIER RESISTANCE STRONGHOLD OF PHNOM MELAY WITH APPROXIMATELY 100 MEN.

NEAR PHNOM PROEK, TO THE SOUTHEAST AND SEVERAL KILOMETERS FROM THE THAI FRONTIER, THERE WAS ONE SMALL GROUP HEADED BY VAONG SARENG, TWO GROUPS TOTALLING 200 MEN WITH 113 WEAPONS (ONE COMMANDED BY A MAN CALLED SIV AND IDENTIFIED AS THE IN TAM GROUP, THE OTHER HEADED BY KROM KIRI WITH CHEA SAREN AS HIS DEPUTY) AND, THREE KILOMETERS FARTHER SOUT, KHOURN THAI'S GROUP OF 125 MEN, OF WHOM 65 WERE ARMED. FARTHER SOUTH TOWARD PAILIN WERE THREE OTHER GROUPS--PROM VANNA WITH 25 MEN, KETH RETH WITH 60, AND PHUM VETH WITH 100--WHE WERE NOT INVOLVED IN THE KC OFFENSIVE AND APPARENTLY REMAIN IN PLACE.

3. KHOURN THAI BELIEVED HE MAY HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR TRIGGERING THE OFFENSIVE WHEN HIS OUTFIT LAID WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE A SUCCESSFUL AMBUSH OF KC IN PHNOM MELAY DEC 1, CLAIMING THEY KILLED OR WOUNDED TOTAL OF ABOUT 45 OF THEM. BEGINNING JAN 4, KC OFFENSIVE FIRST ATTACKED AND DECIMATED VONG SAREN GROUP AND OCCUPIED CAMP. BY JAN 6, IN WHAT WAS OBVIOUSLY WELL COORDINATED OPERATION BASED ON GOOD INTELLIGENCE, KHOURN THAI WAS SURROUNDED TO THE EAST AND SOUTH.

4. DURING NEXT SEVERAL DAYS, UNIT OF 70 MEN FROM THE COMBINED GROUP OF 200 MOVED NORTHWARD TO TRY TO RETAKE VONG SAREN'S BASE WHICH KC CONTINUED TO HOLD, KHOURN THAI CLAIMING THAT HE ARGUED IN VAIN AGAINST IT BECAUSE NONE OF THE GROUPS HAVE VERY MUCH AMMUNITION FOR THEIR MOTLEY COLLECTION OF AK-47, M-16, M-79 OR, FOR THEIR PRINCIPAL ARM, SIMPLE SHOTGUNS; LITTLE MEDICINE; AND NOT MUCH RICE.
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HE HAD URGED THEM ALL TO GROUP THEIR MEN AND SUPPLIES TOGETHER. WHEN THE 70 MOVED OUT, KC ATTACKED THEM, WITH SURVIVORS LATER MAKING THEIR WAY TO JOIN KHOURN THAI, WHO WAS CONTINUING TO TRY TO HOLD BACK THE KC THRUST ON HIS FLANKS. ALMOST AT SAME TIME AS THE 70 LEFT, A LARGE KC ELEMENT MOVED THROUGH THE CENTER AND ATTACKED THE LARGELY UNARMED REMAINDER OF THE 200. IN THE SLAUGHTER, THE MEN BEGAN FLEEING TO THAILAND, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT THE KC HAD OUTGUESSED THEM AND WERE POSITIONED ON THAI TERRITORY IN WAIT. KHOURN THAI SAID THAT ALMOST NO MEN ESCAPED. SIV WAS KILLED, WHEREAS KROM KIRI FLED AT AN EARLY STAGE OF THE BATTLE.

5. BY JAN 11, KHOURN THAI HAD LOST TEN OF HIS MEN AND WAS KEEPING TIGHT CONTROL OF THE REMAINDER BUT WAS SURROUNDED ON FOUR SIDES. WITH ALMOST NO SUPPLIES LEFT, A HOLE IN THE KC LINES WAS LOCATED TO THE SOUTHEAST. HE AND HIS MEN ADVANCED THROUGH IT FARTHER INTO CAMBODIA, THEN DOUBLED BACK AND REACHED THAILAND. KNOWING THE THAI

WOULD DISARM THEM, THEY BURIED THEIR WEAPONS, MAKING THE ARANYAPRATHET DISTRICT OFFICER FURIOUS, AND MOST OF THE MEN ENTERED THE REFUGEE CAMP. THE KC HAVING FIXED A 300,000 BAHT (\$15,000) PRICE ON HIS HEAD WHICH HE FEARED SOME THAI MIGHT ALSO TRY TO COLLECT, KHOURN THAI GAVE UP HIS RESISTANCE STRUGGLE AT THAT POINT AFTER ALMOST TWO YEARS.

6. KHOURN THAI SAID THAT ONE KC REGIMENT, OUT OF THE THREE BELIEVED TO BE LOCATED IN NORTHWESTERN CAMBODIA, PARTICIPATED IN THE WELL-CONCEIVED OPERATION. THE REGIMENT'S THREE BATTALIONS NUMBERED BETWEEN 800-900 MEN, INCLUDING BOTH VERY YOUNG AND OLDER MEN. WHAT WERE REPORTED TO BE NINE ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS TURNED OUT TO BE SIMPLE MILITARY TRUCKS.

7. LIKE OTHER RESISTANCE LEADERS WHO HAVE GIVEN UP, KHOURN THAI LEAVES THAILAND DEPRESSED, SAYING THAT
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RESISTANCE CAN ONLY SUCCEED IF IT RECEIVES ADEQUATE OUTSIDE SUPPORT, WHICH HAS SIMPLY NOT BEEN THE CASE TO DATE. THREE TEAMS HE SENT IN TO POPULATED AREAS OF CAMBODIA DURING THE MONTH OF DECEMBER RETURNED, CLAIMING THAT 90 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION WOULD RISE UP AGAINST THE KC IF THEY THOUGHT THEY HAD SOME SUPPORT. A VILLAGE OF 400 FAMILIES, GUARDED ONLY BY FOUR KC, WOULD BE VERY EASY TO TAKE. HE DEPARTS WITH THE HOPE (WHICH HAS NO PRESENT FOUNDATION) THAT SOMETHING MAY BREAK IN THE FUTURE, AT WHICH TIME HE CAN RETURN.

8. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH KHOURN THAI WAS UNDOUBTEDLY EXAGGERATING HIS OWN WISDOM AND ROLE, HIS STORY DEMONSTRATES ONCE AGAIN THE INABILITY OF THE CAMBODIAN RESISTANCE GROUPS TO WORK TOGETHER EFFECTIVELY. IN A SMALL PART OF WESTERN BATTAMBANG PROVINCE FOUR RESISTANCE GROUPS WERE SEPARATED FROM ONE ANOTHER AND BARELY ON SPEAKING TERMS. FOR THEIR PART, THE KC PULLED OFF A WELL-COORDINATED OPERATION WHICH WILL RID THE AREA OF RESISTANCE FOR A TIME. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THEIR OWN LACK OF TROOPS, THE KC WILL PROBABLY WITHDRAW MOST OR ALL OF THEIR FORCES FROM THAT THICK JUNGLE EVENTUALLY, AND IT WILL BECOME ONCE AGAIN A NO MAN'S LAND. SUCH IS THE SAGA OF CAMBODIA TODAY. THE EMBASSY ADHERES TO ITS PAST VIEW THAT THE RESISTANCE OF WHICH WE ARE AWARE IN CAMBODIA IS ONLY A NUISANCE TO THE KC BUT WILL NOT COMPLETELY DISAPPEAR.
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